# Computerize?
# The answer is obvious

*LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT begins series focusing on software for lawn/landscape/grounds companies next month.*

By RON HALL/ Managing Editor

**D**avid Tucker admittedly has an agenda when he extols the virtues of computerization in the green industry. He is, after all, president of Sensible Software, Inc., makers of CLIP software program for service industry professionals.

But his presentation at the 1997 PLCAA Conference contained solid information about computerization and particularly about the value of industry-specific software for the green industry (and, not just CLIP). We felt that you, our readers, would appreciate some of Tucker's observations too.

Lawn/landscape professionals increasingly see and rely on the computer as an indispensable business management tool. They've discovered that it can do repetitive tasks, pen-and-pencil tasks, accurately and efficiently. And reduce paperwork substantially.

## More efficiency, reduced costs

Added efficiency reduces costs that don't directly produce revenues, says Tucker. What are these costs? They're everything that doesn't *actually* service your customers and keep them happy. It's the behind-the-scenes activity that runs your business and keeps it going.

"You want to get that as automated and silent as you can to free you up to do what you do best which is to serve your customers," Tucker says. "If you can't do that, you're going to be busy running your company. It's going to take most of your creative energy and time to do that."

With the proper software, a computer can help a lawn/landscape pro:

▶ track financial information, including accounting, estimating, job costing, bidding.

▶ manage employees and employees' time as well as managing customers, equipment and inventory.

▶ market their products and services, by allowing them to professional-quality newsletters and correspondence to customers and potential customers.

▶ creatively, perhaps as a design or drafting tool.

Business owners, first and foremost, use their computers for managing money.

"Computers help you keep money in your pocket," says Tucker. "Next to billing, job costing is probably the most important function you do for your company. Billing gets the money in the door. Job costing tells you whether you're making or losing money on each"

## Powerful 'power' tool

But none of this is possible without business management software. Without the proper software, or if you don't know how to use it, a computer becomes just a fancy typewriter.

It is, in a very real sense, a power tool. Misuse it, and it's of little value. Use it intelligently, and it's incredibly helpful. It can cut your work significantly. That's why, like any other power tool, you want the most efficient, the fastest, the most powerful tool you can afford to take to a job site. Otherwise, why would a mowing contractor spend over $10,000 for a professional mower when that contractor could go to the neighborhood hardware store and buy a consumer-quality mower for about $100? The contrac-

tor buys the expensive mower because, in the long run, it gets the job done, and represents value.

Look at your computer and the programs that run it in this light. You want an up-to-date computer and operating system, and software that addresses your particular business needs. This is even more critical for you because of the seasonal nature of your operations. Most of you only have about 170 work days to make a full year's living—for you, your families, and your employees. You must be efficient.

**Appropriate software**

One way to increase your efficiency is by using software designed specifically for the lawn/landscape industry. While neighborhood computer retailers can supply a universe of "horizontal" (general) business

management software, lawn/landscape pros also have a growing choice of software products targeted directly at them. This "vertical" or industry-specific software typically costs more than off-the-shelf soft-

ware, but it provides users with certain specialized capabilities.

This is what we at LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT are going to be reporting on in a series of articles starting in June—the variety and availability of software products designed for and marketed to lawn/landscape/grounds professionals.

Now that the cost of personal computers and supporting hardware is affordable to even the smallest operation, the question of whether to computerize (or to upgrade your system) or not has already been answered. You can't afford not to. □